Origin of Litchfield County Names, The

Connecticut towns, their formation and naming is an interesting subject. As religious or moral principle was a predominant factor in early New England life, the new communities were generally developments of religious societies, and new townships were the offspring of overgrown parishes.

The principle of naming was first, historical; that is, from towns in England, as Hartford (Hertford), Windsor, New Haven and New London. Later it became biographical or descriptive, and after breaking away from the mother country it became biographical and names were given in honor of their leaders. Many names were the perpetuation of parish names, while others were newly christened at the incorporation of the town. To trace these is both entertaining and of historical value.

Barkhamsted, derived from Berkhamsted, (Great and Little), Hertfordshire, England, was settled in 1746 and incorporated in 1779. It has an area of 39.0 sq. miles.

Bethlehem, incorporated from Woodbury in 1737, is Hebrew, meaning "house of bread". Originally, it was spelled Bethlem, to distinguish it from other American Bethlehems, but it proved to be too awkward for the public, and eventually it took on the same spelling as the rest. It was settled in 1734 and incorporated in 1787. It has an area of 19.7 square miles.

Bridgewater received its name from the first bridge that crossed the Housatonic River on its boundary. It was settled about 1734 and incorporated from New Milford in 1856. It has an area of 16.3 square miles.

Canaan was settled in 1737 and incorporated in 1739. It is a Hebrew name meaning low land. It has an area of 33.4 square miles.

Colebrook, named for one of three places in England, two of which are in the southwest and spelled the same, the third, spelled Colnbrook, is adjacent to London. The first settler came in 1765, and the town was incorporated in 1779. There are 33.0 square miles of territory.

Cornwall, settled in 1738, was named for the southwestern county of England, meaning "Wales of the Cornavii". Incorporated in 1740, it contains 46.8 square miles.

Goshen is a Biblical word describing a region in Egypt. It was settled in 1738 and incorporated in 1739. There are 45.6 square miles of territory in Goshen.

Harwinton, whose name was derived from **Har**tford, **Win**dsor and Farming**ton**, was settled around 1730 and incorporated in 1737. It is comprised of 32.4 square miles.

Kent, settled in 1738 and incorporated in 1739, was named for the English county of Kent. It contains 49.5 square miles.

Litchfield is derived from the English word "Lichfield" meaning a field of corpses, a place for burning heretics. Litchfield has the unique honor of being the only town in the county that was incorporated (1719) one full year before the first settler arrived (1720). It became the seat of government for the newly created county (carved from Hartford County) in 1750. The early Pootatuck Indian word for the area was "Bantam", a name that still exists as a section of the township as well as the name of a large lake. Litchfield has 57.3 square miles of territory.

Morris, settled in 1723, was carved from Litchfield and incorporated in 1859. It was named for James Morris, a native son and Revolutionary War hero who established a famous academy there in 1790. It has an area of 18.8 square miles.

New Hartford, settled in 1732 and incorporated in 1738, was named for Hartford, Connecticut, and has an area of 38.3 square miles.

New Milford, settled in 1707 and incorporated in 1712, was named by its first inhabitants, who had come there from Milford, Connecticut. (Milford's name came from its English settlers who had come there in 1639 from Yorkshire and Essex, England, and is named for Milford, England.) New Milford, having 64.4 square miles, is the largest township in the state.

Norfolk, named for the English county, was settled in 1744 and incorporated in 1758. It has 46.7 square miles of land area.

North Canaan was settled in 1738. It broke off from its parent town of Canaan in 1758 and incorporated the same year. It has 19.6 square miles of territory.

Plymouth split off from Watertown in 1795. It had been settled about 1728. It was named for Plymouth, Mass., which in turn had been named for a town at the mouth of the Plym River in southern England. It has 22.4 square miles of territory.

Salisbury, settled about 1719 and incorporated in 1741, was perhaps named for a settler who owned land at what is now near the center, or perhaps for Salisbury in Wiltshire, England for unknown reasons. It has 60.56 square miles.

Sharon, whose name in Hebrew means "Fertile plain", was settled in 1738 and incorporated in 1739. There are 60.3 square miles within the township.

Thomaston, settled in 1728, was named for renowned clockmaker Seth Thomas, who set up his clock factory here in 1853. It split off from Plymouth and incorporated in 1875. Thomaston consists of 12.0 square miles.

Torrington, settled in 1737 and incorporated in 1740, was named for Torrington, Devonshire, England. It has 40.0 square miles of land.

Warren, incorporated from Kent in 1786, had been settled in 1737. It was named for American patriot and physician, Gen. Joseph Warren, who was killed at the battle of Bunker Hill. He was an early and extremely popular martyr of the American cause. Warren consists of 28.0 square miles.

Washington was created from pieces of Litchfield, Woodbury, Kent and New Milford in 1779, after having been settled in 1734, and was called Judea for several years after the ecclesiastical society that formed there. It was named after the father of our country after his death in 1799, being the second town in the country out of many that have done so. There are 38.7 square miles of land in the township.

Watertown was settled around 1700, and the first ecclesiastical society was called Westbury. After it broke off from Waterbury in 1780, the name was changed. The name is descriptive, and is a variation of Waterbury, which itself means "a place of numerous rivers, rivulets, ponds, swamps, boggy meadows and wet lands". It contains 29.8 square miles of land.

Winchester, settled in 1750 and incorporated in 1771, was named for Winchester, Hampshire, England. It contains 34.0 square miles.

Woodbury, settled in 1672, was incorporated in 1674. It is a descriptive word meaning the town was well wooded when founded.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg